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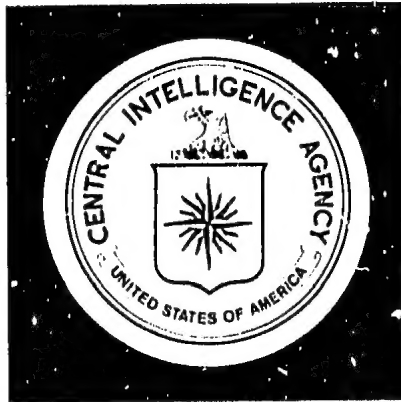
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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

## *Developments in Indochina*

State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA*(Information as of 1500)*Page

## SOUTH VIETNAM

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The MR-2 commander intends to recapture some hamlets in Darlac Province and reopen Highway 14 from Pleiku to Ban Me Thuot. In MR-1, the commander of the South Vietnamese 2nd Division says he plans to retake areas in southern Quang Ngai Province. The MR-3 commander has decided to be more faithful in honoring the cease-fire. President Thieu inaugurated his new "popular front" on 23 February.

## LAOS

3

Cease-fire violations are concentrated in the south and in the Plaine des Jarres area; the north is fairly quiet. Souvanna has protested the violations

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## CAMBODIA

6

The government has cleared Route 1 south of Phnom Penh and is taking special security precautions for a convoy scheduled to move up the Mekong on 24 February. Students and teachers are on strike protesting price increases. The army is still struggling with padded payrolls.

## NORTH VIETNAM

9

The National Assembly adjourned after two days of meetings and talks by Premier Pham Van Dong, Foreign Minister Trinh, and Defense Minister Giap.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Fighting remains light throughout the country, although action increased somewhat in Pleiku and Darlac provinces in Military Region (MR) 2. The Communists reportedly attacked some government artillery camps in Pleiku without much success and continued to harass Route 14. US officials report that the MR-2 commander, General Toan, is preparing a major operation to recapture hamlets in Darlac's Buon Ho District, and to reopen Highway 14 from Pleiku City to Ban Me Thuot. Toan has fired the Darlac Province chief for failing to clear the Communists from the hamlets and has ordered government troops to resecure these areas by 26 February.

In MR-1, a slight increase in action was reported west of Hue, but fighting along the northern frontier in Quang Tri Province was the lightest since the cease-fire began. Government troops from the 2nd Division have cleared Route 1 from Sa Huynh village to the Binh Dinh Province border. General Nhut, the division commander, told a US Embassy officer that he was pleased with his troops' performance. He commented that the successful operation had been conducted without US help of any kind and that US advisory assistance will not be needed in the future. Nhut said he intends to keep up the pressure in southern Quang Ngai Province and to retake other areas that the Communists have recently captured or had controlled before the cease-fire. He specifically mentioned the two district towns of Duc Pho and Ba To. He indicated that these operations would begin within the next few days.

The government's commander for MR-3, General Minh, is exuding more confidence about security in his region. Despite his earlier orders to ignore the Joint Military Commission's appeal on 17 February to honor the cease-fire, Minh has now directed his commanders to abide by the announcement. He

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[redacted]

also has ordered his province chiefs to extend whatever cooperation is necessary to members of the ICCS and JMC contingents assigned to MR-3. Minh maintains that he now realizes what effect a non-cooperative South Vietnamese attitude would have on world opinion, and he wants to be sure that the world press will not be able to blame the government for "sabotaging" the cease-fire agreement.

[redacted]

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Thieu's New Front

President Thieu's new "popular front" held its inaugural meeting in Saigon on 23 February. Thieu addressed a crowd of several thousand at the ceremony, denouncing the Communists for delaying serious negotiations on a final political settlement. He called on the front to be prepared for a political struggle, and indicated that the front would be set up at the provincial and the village levels, as well as the national level. Signs of organizational activity have already appeared in some provinces. There also are indications that the Democracy Party will play an important role; one front participant claims that party cadre are to hold all key positions.

Reaction to the front from the country's political figures varies from optimism that it can become an effective counter-force to the Communists to suspicion about Thieu's motives. Most seem to agree that its immediate purpose is to improve the Thieu government's image at the Paris conference next week and the President's subsequent visit to the US. Some feel that the success of the front will depend on Thieu's willingness to make concessions, particularly in liberalizing the decree on political parties. Senate Chairman Huyen, however, fears that Thieu may use the front to undermine the authority of constitutional bodies such as the National Assembly.

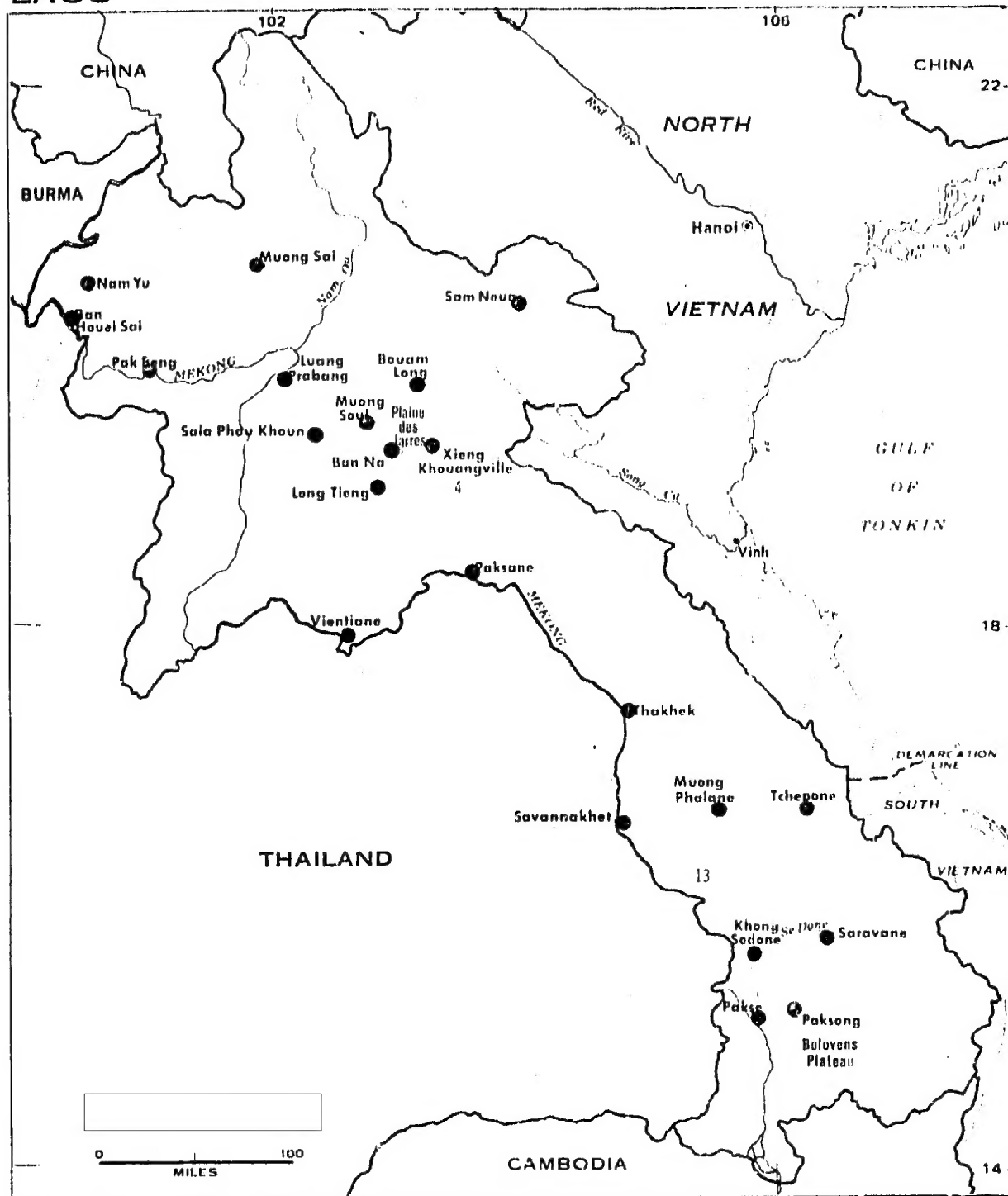
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# LAOS



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LAOS

Additional reporting from the south indicates that the North Vietnamese attack on Paksong began shortly before the noon cease-fire deadline on 22 February. Fighting continued briefly past the deadline, and government field commanders report that their units had withdrawn from the town by 1230 local time.

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[REDACTED]

Elsewhere in the south, Communist units attacked and dispersed a government battalion west of Saravane early in the afternoon of 22 February. Later in the day, an enemy attack forced Lao Army troops to abandon a village on Route 13 northeast of Khong Sedone.

In the central panhandle, there were several minor incidents in violation of the cease-fire. Enemy gunners fired mortar barrages at government positions east and south of Thakhek on 22 February, and preliminary reports indicate that a Lao Army force pushing north on Route 13 from Thakhek was attacked early on 23 February.

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[REDACTED]

The North

Only relatively minor military activity has been reported from northern Laos since the initiation of the cease-fire. Fragmentary reports indicate that late on 22 February the Communists shelled government units near the Sala Phou Khoun road junction. Lao ground observers alleged that two tanks were involved in these attacks.

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[REDACTED]

Irregular troops west of the Plaine des Jarres near Ban Na have reported that sporadic enemy artillery and mortar fire continued until dusk on 22 February. During the previous night, these units abandoned one position in the face of heavy Communist fire, but reoccupied it without opposition after the cease-fire went into effect. East of the Plaine, a North Vietnamese unit attacked a government force near Xieng Khouangville on the afternoon following the cease-fire deadline. General Vang Pao responded by ordering Lao T-28s to hit enemy positions in this area and also southwest of the Plaine.

[REDACTED]

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Souvanna on Violations

Prime Minister Souvanna at a press conference on 23 February fired the first shot in the propaganda war of charges and countercharges of cease-fire violations. Before a receptive audience of local and foreign correspondents, Souvanna accused the Communists of 29 cease-fire violations and said that they had started a "general offensive" while "the ink is not yet dry" on the agreement. He said he was sending a protest to the International Control Commission and that he would seek a renewal of US bombing if the violations continue. The Prime Minister also stated that the Lao would "pay any price" to retake Paksong.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

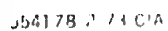
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CAMBODIA

Government forces met only token resistance on 22 February as they finally cleared a short section of Route 1 about 15 miles southeast of Phnom Penh. The highway had been closed for almost two weeks. Meanwhile, Khmer insurgent units are continuing to put pressure on government units on Routes 2 and 3. On Route 2, government troops abandoned an outpost some 20 miles south of the capital on 22 February after a brief attack, and the insurgents continue to harass Cambodian positions nearby. To the west, government troops have been forced to withdraw from two positions on Route 3 about 25 miles south of Phnom Penh, and the insurgents retain their control over the highway in that sector.

East of the Mekong River, the insurgents are still probing government outposts north and south of Neak Luong. The government is trying to shore up its shaky defenses in this area, and is taking extra security precautions to ensure the safe passage of a Mekong convoy that is due to move up the river from South Vietnam to Phnom Penh on 24 February. US, as well as Cambodian, air cover will be available for the convoy. As a result of a damaging insurgent attack on the last convoy on 16 February, one major foreign shipping firm has threatened to withdraw its vessels from the run unless better protection is provided. The presence of insurgents along the Mekong's east bank suggests that the convoy may well be harassed.

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Strikes in Phnom Penh

The US Embassy reports that all government schools in Phnom Penh are still closed as a result of strikes by teachers and students that began on 20 February.

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[REDACTED]

The teachers maintain that they will stay out until the government rescinds recent price increases on petroleum products and other items, and until their salaries are raised. University students are also calling for a roll-back in prices. In addition, they are demanding that the government crack down on corrupt officials. Although no disturbances have occurred thus far, some anti-government banners have begun to appear on school buildings. Several place the blame for the present situation squarely on President Lon Nol.

The education minister reportedly has told some of his key subordinates that the government is thinking of taking strong action--including arrests--against leaders of the strikes. He also apparently indicated, 25X1 however, that he is willing to meet with the strike leaders if they make the request. [REDACTED]

#### Army Problems

Minister of Defense General Thappana Nginn has told [REDACTED] that the elimination of 25X1 "ghosts" from military payrolls continues to be his most pressing problem. The general stated that disagreement among military authorities over what constitutes an "effective" soldier and confusion over the categories of personnel on the army payroll make it very difficult to come up with accurate figures. He believes that the army's true strength is about 200,000 to 210,000 rather than the approximately 270,000 personnel now on the official rolls.

Thappana Nginn also said that he would like to institute certain innovations that would not only clarify the actual number of troops, but would raise troop morale. One possibility, he said, was to establish central training facilities through which battalion-sized units would pass every four to six weeks.

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He believes this would be a way to arrive at an accurate troop count and would also improve the army's over-all effectiveness. He would also like to set up cooperatives where military personnel could purchase their equipment at reasonable prices.

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NORTH VIETNAM

This week's session of the North Vietnamese national assembly was even more pro:forma than usual. Its sole action was to endorse the Paris accords and to express approval of the Laos agreement that was reached while the session was in progress. Having heard the usual string of reports from Premier Pham Van Dong, Foreign Minister Trinh, and Defense Minister Giap (the latter two, as usual, were not carried by the media), the assembly expressed its joy at the arrival of peace and its support of the party and government. It then dispersed, after meeting for only two days.

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